



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

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Welcome to Navy History Matters—our weekly compilation of articles, commentaries, and blogs related to history and heritage. Every week we'll gather the top-interest items from a variety of media and social media sources and then link you to related content at NHHC's website (history.navy.mil), your authoritative source for Navy history.

★ Navy Museum Commemorates 60th Anniversary of Trieste

On Jan. 23, the [National Museum of the U.S. Navy](#) commemorated the 60th anniversary of [Bathyscaphe Trieste](#)'s historic dive with guest of honor retired Capt. Don Walsh, PhD, who commanded the bathyscaphe as a lieutenant. On Jan. 23, 1960, Walsh and Jacques Piccard descended seven miles to Challenger Deep—the deepest known point of the Earth's oceans—at the southern end of the Mariana Trench. The dive took about nine hours to complete. “We just barely made it in a very long week period just to make this one dive over 60 years ago...,” said Walsh. During the commemoration, Walsh colorfully told the “back story” of the dive and pointed out how it opened many doors for him during his career. “Mr. Don Walsh has had an extraordinary career,” said NHHC Director [Sam Cox](#). “After getting out of the Navy, his service to our nation and frankly, to the world, has been extraordinary as a leader of ocean engineering, deep sea diving, and all manner of underwater activity.” For more, [read the article](#) at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/news-and-events/news/2020/navy-museum-commemorates-60th-anniversary-trieste.html>

★ WWII@75: *Serpens* Explodes

On Jan. 29, 1945, 75 years ago, while loading a cargo of depth charges in Lunga Point, off Guadalcanal, a massive explosion destroyed [USS *Serpens*](#) (AK-97). *Serpens* was a Liberty ship commissioned in 1943, operated by a U.S. Coast Guard crew. The explosion killed 196 Coast Guardsmen, 57 U.S. Army stevedores, one public health service doctor, and a Soldier ashore hit by shrapnel. Miraculously, two crewmembers on the ship somehow survived. The explosion was the largest loss of U.S. Coast Guard life in a single incident in history. Initially, the cause was thought to have been an enemy attack; after [World War II](#), an internal cause was determined. For more, [read H-029-5: A brief history of major U.S. Navy ordnance accidents](#) at the [Director's Corner](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-89000/NH-89186.html>

★ President Approves Carrier Namesakes—25 Years Ago

On Feb. 2, 1995, Secretary of the Navy [John H. Dalton](#) announced President William J. Clinton approved his [recommendation to name](#) two *Nimitz*-class carriers under construction in honor of former presidents Harry S. Truman and Ronald Reagan. [Harry S. Truman](#) was commissioned on July 25, 1998, and [Ronald Reagan](#) was commissioned on July 12, 2003. During their service, the carriers supported combat missions during operations [Enduring Freedom](#) and [Iraqi Freedom](#), and both have won the Battle Efficiency “E” award on multiple occasions. In 2011, *Ronald Regan* provided humanitarian support for the catastrophic 9.0 earthquake that hit Japan and, in November 2015, *Harry S. Truman* deployed in support of [Inherent Resolve](#). During the eight-month deployment, *Harry S. Truman* traveled more than 53,000 nautical miles, flew more than 27,000 flight hours, and conducted 9,500 sorties.



Photo Link: <https://www.navy.mil/management/photodb/photos/040527-N-0610T-003.jpg>

★ African American/Black History Month

Throughout the month of February, the nation observes [African American/Black History Month](#) to celebrate contributions to this nation. The theme for 2020 is “Honoring the Past, Securing the Future!” This year’s Black History Month poster is the first in a series of posters commemorating the 75th anniversary of [World War II](#). It honors Soldiers from Company A, 452nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery—one of the U.S. Army’s segregated combat units during the war. The contributions African Americans have made and continue to make are an integral part of our military and society, and the history of African Americans exemplifies those contributions that continue to make our nation great. To learn more about the [African-American experience in the U.S. Navy](#), go to [NHHC’s website](#).

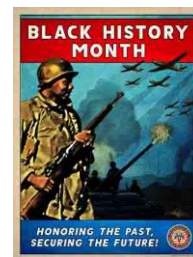


Photo Link: <https://www.deomi.org/human-relations/special-observances.cfm?tab=1>

★ U.S. Fleet Cyber Command/U.S. Tenth Fleet Established

On Jan. 29, 2010, 10 years ago, U.S. Fleet Cyber Command and U.S. Tenth Fleet were reestablished and established, respectively, at Fort Meade, MD. The establishment of the command was the result of a May 2009 White House cyberspace policy review that stated, “America’s failure to protect cyberspace is one of the most urgent national security problems facing the new administration.” Since its inception, [U.S. Fleet Cyber Command/U.S. Tenth Fleet](#) has grown into an operational force composed of more than 14,000 personnel organized into 28 active commands, 40 cyber-mission force units, and 27 reserve commands around the globe.



Photo Link: <https://www.dvidshub.net/graphic/6723/u-s-fleet-cyber-command-logos>

★ Payback at Balikpapan

Following the [Pearl Harbor attack](#), Japan’s military rolled across the Pacific like an unstoppable tidal wave. The thirst for natural resources, such as oil, was unquenchable. In the blink of an eye, Japan’s empire expanded from the resource-rich Dutch East Indies to the swamps of New Guinea and the [Solomons](#). An early target for the Japanese during [World War II](#) was the vital oil port of Balikpapan on the eastern shore of Borneo, one of the largest islands of the East Indies. Balikpapan had an abundance of oil that was unusually pure. The oil was so pure it could be pumped directly into a vessel’s oil bunkers, bypassing the refining process altogether. The Dutch did their best to resist the Japanese advance on Borneo, but it was just a matter of time before the island would fall into enemy hands. Despite the urgency to protect the oil, American warships were spread out from one end of their operating area to the other. Many of the ships were outdated as well, built for [World War I](#). To find out what happened, [read the article](#) in the *Navy Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhnc-series/nh-series/80-G-179000/80-G-179041.html>

★ Project Zebra and a Crash Everyone Tried to Pretend Never Happened

For decades, locals of Elizabeth City, NC, knew nothing about it. However, 75 years ago, a Russian plane loaded with American goods crashed into the Pasquotank River, killing a majority of the crew. The aircraft was a PBN-1 Nomad manufactured by the Navy for the Russians during [World War II](#). The flight was part of a highly secretive lend-lease training collaboration between [American aviators](#) and Russian pilots dubbed Project Zebra. “I think it is accurate to say that we did at that point have a beautiful relationship,” said Don Pendergraft, director of the [Museum of the Albemarle](#). “It was an experiment that went very well.” During their time off, the Russians would go into town and buy large amounts of cloth, cigarettes, and French perfume, which was nearly impossible to find in the Soviet Union. On Jan. 11, 1945, the Nomad—heavily loaded with American goods—took off and then crashed almost immediately into the river. Five of the eight on board were killed. For more, [read the article](#) in the *Navy Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhnc-series/nh-series/80-G-703000/80-G-703110.html>

★ CFAY Celebrates its 75th Anniversary in 2020

Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) unveiled a special command logo recently commemorating 75 years of promoting peace and partnership with the city of Yokosuka and Japan. The yearlong commemoration will last throughout 2020 and will spotlight its past, present, and ongoing friendship. “Since its inception nearly 75 years ago, CFAY has worked to promote peace in the region and deepening its partnership with its host nation by supporting the readiness of the U.S. Navy in the Pacific and representing our nation’s commitment to the U.S.-Japan Alliance,” said Capt. Rich Jarrett, commanding officer of CFAY. After the Japanese government accepted the Potsdam Declaration on Aug. 14, 1945—VJ Day—military assets began arriving in Japan to help stabilize and rebuild the country following World War II. For more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.navy.mil/media/dvids/image/191220-N-NB144-0013.jpg>

★ Tens of Thousands of Valentine’s Delivered to 104-year-old WWII Veteran

Earlier this month, a resident of The Oaks at Inglewood—an assisted-care facility in Stockton, CA—requested on social media that Valentine’s Day cards be sent to another resident of the facility who happens to be a 104-year-old World War II veteran and recipient of the Purple Heart. Since then, tens of thousands of cards have arrived. “I wasn’t expecting anything like this,” said retired U.S. Marine Maj. Bill White. “It hit me like a ton of bricks. Up until a week or two ago, I was leading a quiet life...now all of a sudden all Hell has broken loose.” The goal of Operation Valentine was just 10,000 cards. In just one day alone, about 14,000 pieces of mail were delivered. White, who is also a veteran of the Korean War, received the Purple Heart for injuries he sustained during the Battle for Iwo Jima. “I’ve been a Marine for 85 years now—30 years active, 55 years retired,” he said. “So, if they feel like it, they could call me back on active duty anytime. I’m still on the list.” For more, [read the article](#) in *Stars & Stripes*.



Photo Link: <https://www.stripes.com/news/us/tens-of-thousands-of-valentine-s-and-an-outpouring-of-love-delivered-to-104-year-old-wwii-veteran-1.616045>

★ NHHC Webpage of the Week

On Jan. 29, 1944, battleship USS Missouri was christened. *Missouri* was launched later that month, and then commissioned on June 11, 1944. Although most remember *Missouri* as the symbolic end of World War II, she was a highly decorated battleship that earned eight battle stars during her service to the nation—three during WWII and five during the Korean War. *Missouri* was also the first battleship to fire Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iraqi targets at the commencement of Desert Storm. In celebration of one of America’s greatest ships, this week’s Webpage of the Week is the USS Missouri: “Mighty Mo” page located under NHHC’s notable ships. On this page, read a short history, and then explore all the reading material, artifacts, art, and imagery associated with “Mighty Mo.”



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-navy-ships/battleships/missouri-bb-63/NH-96814-KN.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Jan. 28, 1986, at 11:40 a.m., the space shuttle Challenger tragically exploded 73 seconds into the flight, killing all seven astronauts, including Navy Cmdr. Michael Smith. The explosion was the result of a leak in one of the two solid rocket boosters that ignited the main liquid fuel tank. Smith was a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, class of 1967 and earned his aviator wings in May 1969. He was selected as a NASA astronaut in May 1980, and after completing further training, received his first assignment as a space shuttle pilot—the *Challenger* mission. The explosion of *Challenger* became one of the most significant events of the 1980s, as billions around the world watched it on live television.



For more dates in naval history, including your selected span of dates, see [Year at a Glance](#) at [NHHC’s website](#). Be sure to check this page regularly, as content is updated frequently.

Photo Link: https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/images/106994main_image_feature_256_aihfull.jpg